



# HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR LOVE?

*Leave the village church in your rear-view and take your celebration global. Here are 10 red-hot locations for a destination wedding that we're loving right now*

## Chase the summer in South Africa

**Why it's hot** "Absolutely mind-blowing natural beauty, great weather, first-rate service and fantastic value for money," says Christina Holt, managing director of Cape Town-based Wedding Concepts ([weddingconcepts.co.za](http://weddingconcepts.co.za)).

**Degree of difficulty** Easy – there are no residency requirements, and your officiant will handle all of the legalities for you on the day.

**When to go** "From October to the end of April – summertime in the southern hemisphere – you can more or less be guaranteed warm, lovely weather for an outdoor ceremony."

**Location, location** "The hugely popular winelands region, just 45 minutes from Cape Town, is home to historic wine estates and offers amazing views, cuisine and hotels. If you want a safari element included in your celebration, bush weddings at a lodge hired exclusively are very unique (we did one recently at the Mattanu Private Game Reserve in the Northern Cape). The logistics for a beach wedding in Cape Town are actually quite tricky – it's windy, and you can't drink on the beach – but it can be done if you choose an adjacent venue such as a private villa or hold the reception elsewhere."

**Must-haves** "Introduce some African entertainment in an authentic way, rather than a touristy way. You can hire a phenomenal vocalist or children's choir; bring in a Zulu dance troupe for a 20-minute wow-factor performance during the drinks reception, or arrange a drumming circle, where guests are led through a session by two drum masters."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Travel down South Africa's Garden Route and end with a safari in Kruger Park, explore Namibia, or jet off to the Seychelles, Mauritius or Mozambique – which is a very up and coming destination."

## Big love in the Big Apple

**Why it's hot** "New York is a complete knockout, with amazing food, views, nightlife and culture," explains Manhattan-based wedding designer Michelle Rago ([michelleragoldt.com](http://michelleragoldt.com)). "Destination weddings are about putting together your unique point of view, and you can reinvent yourself three times a day, seven days a week here – everybody's game for anything."

**Degree of difficulty** Easy. Obtain a marriage licence from the City Clerk's Office, which is valid from 24 hours to 60 days after it's issued.

**When to go** "Spring and autumn are our most beautiful seasons, but December is pretty special too, and you might even get some snowy pics."

**Location, location** "The Plaza on Central Park South is quintessential New York, and I love the New York Public Library. The Glasshouses in

Chelsea is a great smaller venue with floor-to-ceiling windows and a balcony."

**Must-haves** "I love to do boat rides around Manhattan to welcome guests, hire a yellow taxi for the bride and groom and put gift bags in hotels with the *New York Times*, bagels and cream cheese for the morning after."

**Head off on honeymoon** "The Caribbean is in our backyard, or do the Americana thing with a trip to the middle of the country, like a ranch in Montana, or road trip through New England."

## A Caribbean-cool celebration

**Why it's hot** "It's perfect for a relaxed atmosphere and easy to incorporate friends and family into the event," says Hayat Bournier, weddings supervisor at Virgin Holidays ([virginholidays.co.uk](http://virginholidays.co.uk)). "The resorts all tend to be large enough to accommodate kids' clubs, and it's only five to eight hours away by direct flight."

**Degree of difficulty** Depends on the island, but overall easy. "Antigua and Barbados are two of the simplest, with just a one-day residency requirement. Jamaica and Saint Lucia, which are also really popular with UK brides, require three-day residency."

**When to go** "January to May is best if you want to avoid hurricane season, which runs from June to the end of November. December is also fantastic."

**Location, location** "Our couples love the flexibility and personalisation available with Martha Stewart Weddings at Sandals. The St James Club in Antigua is fantastic for families bringing kids along and has one of the best beaches on the island, and we also love Almond Morgan Bay in Saint Lucia."

**Must-haves** "Playing to the feel of the island is key. Use exotic local flowers and a vibrant colour scheme of hot pinks, yellows and oranges, create a signature cocktail for your day with tropical flair and provide flip-flops for your guests."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Pick up a cruise from San Juan, Puerto Rico, and island-hop around the Caribbean. Or spend a couple of days in a smaller resort on St Martin, St Thomas or St Kitts."

## Vive l'amour, French style!

**Why it's hot** "The French Riviera from Monaco to Saint-Tropez is fabulous because you can choose between countryside, sea and mountains," says Chloé Atlan, co-founder of Aava Communication ([aava-communication.com](http://aava-communication.com)). "The views are exceptional, and all locations are very close to Nice International Airport."

**Degree of difficulty** High. For a legal wedding, there is a 40-day residency requirement and complicated paperwork. The easiest option is to have a symbolic blessing in France after a legal ceremony in the UK.

**When to go** "From May to September, it's sunny almost every day, although it can be very hot in July and August so don't start your ceremony too early in the day. December can also be beautiful, with sunny days and clear skies."

**Location, location** "Castles, villas on the seafront, French gardens, wineries..."

**Must-haves** "The traditional dessert is the French wedding cake *croquembouche*, which looks like profiteroles in a pyramid shape. Favours can be anything from Provençal herbs and lavender seeds to pashminas and cigars. However, the typical gift for French people is *dragées*, a sweet made of almond and sugar and sometimes chocolate."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Provence, Corsica or Italy are three very romantic options. Monaco and Saint-Tropez are in the top 10 as well."

## California dreamin' in wine country

**Why it's hot** "Napa and Sonoma Valley are meccas for amazing wine-tasting and dining, and are just a 90-minute drive from San Francisco International Airport," says Alison Hotchkiss, principal of AE Planning & Design in San Francisco ([alisonevents.com](http://alisonevents.com)) and author of *Destination Weddings: The Ultimate Guide to Planning a Wedding From Afar* (Chronicle Books). "As well as sipping fabulous vino, you can bike, hike, take a hot-air balloon ride or lounge by the pool."

**Degree of difficulty** Easy. Obtain your marriage license (valid for up to three months) at city hall.

**When to go** June to October, when the weather is predictably sunny.

**Location, location** "Many wineries actually don't allow weddings, but I love Kunde Vineyards, Chateau Souveraine, Jacuzzi and Cline Cellars in Sonoma, which all do. There are also great hotel options, such as Calistoga Ranch, Auberge du Soleil and Solage Calistoga, or the gorgeous grounds at Beaulieu Garden and Beltane Ranch."

**Must-haves** "Offer a wine-tasting during your cocktail reception, and take advantage of all the fantastic local cheeses. Biking to and from the wineries is also a nice touch."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Drive down the coast to Post Ranch Inn or Ventana in Big Sur, which has some of the world's most breathtaking coastline. Or hop on a flight to fabulous Hawaii, which is less than six hours from San Francisco."

## Soak up the sun in Cyprus

**Why it's hot** "Sun, sand and sea!" says planner Sharron Masoura ([exclusiveyachtweddings.com](http://exclusiveyachtweddings.com)). "Cyprus is known as the Island of Love, and as a former British colony, it still retains a British sensibility. It's also a really economical choice for a destination wedding, plus all the legalities are in English which means less risk of misunderstanding."



**Degree of difficulty** Standard. There is a three working day residency requirement before being able to marry.

**When to go** "May, June, September and October are the busiest, but we have 340 days of sunshine here, so it's a year-round resort."

**Location, location** "The most popular areas are Paphos on the east coast, with its history and culture, and Ayia Napa on the west. For a unique experience, hire one of the yachts in Paphos exclusively for your party."

**Must-haves** "Tasty fresh seafood and meze on the menu and traditional dancers will add the perfect touch of Cypriot culture."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Charter your own yacht and crew from Ayia Napa and explore the rest of the island – Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos and Latchi. Egypt is only a 50-minute flight away."

## Party on in Ibiza

**Why it's hot** "Ibiza is a place where anything goes," says Gemma Bowman, founder of Ibiza Wedding ([ibizawedding.com](http://ibizawedding.com)). "We've done everything from a wedding where the bride was carried down the beach on a four-poster bed to traditional Catholic ceremonies in a white-washed church on a hill."

**Degree of difficulty** High. To marry legally, one of you must be Catholic or a legal resident of Spain – "and unlike France, you can't just rock up for a six-week holiday and be considered a resident." Take care of the legal bit at home and have a spiritual or Anglican blessing on the island.

**When to go** "I love June, but May, September and October are also really popular. July and August are very hot and many venues become

prohibitively expensive, while tourism grinds to a halt in winter, but it's great for planning."

**Location, location** "There are so many, from stunning beach venues on the southwest coast that catch the famous sunset, to private villas in the north if you're looking for beautiful boutique hotels on rustic properties."

**Must-haves** "White linens, bold red Balinese-inspired decor, and really good Mediterranean cuisine. Hire a Spanish guitarist, flamenco dancers or a DJ playing ambient Ibiza-style chill-out music. At a wedding in September, we had beautifully dressed go-go dancers from Pacha nightclub – I can't imagine that would look appropriate at a stately manor in Hertfordshire, but something a bit out-there works over here!"

**Head off on honeymoon** "Formentera is staggeringly beautiful, with crystalline water and pink-hued sand – very Caribbean – and it's just a 30-minute speed-boat ride away."

## True romance in Italy

**Why it's hot** "An enviable list of excellent wines, sublime cuisine, gorgeous cities, fascinating small villages and a fabulous climate," says Clara Boatto, founder of Chic Weddings in Italy ([chicweddingsinitaly.com](http://chicweddingsinitaly.com)). "Tuscany remains the most requested, but a growing number of international couples are now considering Umbria, Marche, Abruzzi and Puglia."

**Degree of difficulty** Medium. "There are no specific residency requirements, but you'll need to publish the banns in the UK and obtain a 'Nulla Osta' (the Italian equivalent of a Certificate of No Impediment) at the British Consulate in Italy. It is recommended that couples arrive three to four

days before their wedding so the Town Clerk has time to process the paperwork."

**When to go** "Anytime – it just depends on the type of wedding you'd like as Italy can offer ideal locations in both the summer and winter months."

**Location, location** "Great options include a bucolic ceremony in a converted Tuscan farmhouse surrounded by olive groves, a cosy chalet in the Dolomites with a snow-capped mountain backdrop, a terrace overlooking the water in Sicily, or a decadent masquerade ball on the Grand Canal in Venice."

**Must-haves** "Good espresso at the end of dinner and limoncello or sambuca after dessert, a buffet of gourmet almond confetti from Conti Confeetteria in Milan, a vintage car like an Alfa Romeo Giulietta or the Pininfarina spider – and Italian shoes by Valentino or Sergio Rossi!"

**Head off on honeymoon** "Definitely Pantelleria or the Aeolian Islands. Both are untouched places with an extremely romantic atmosphere."

## Tropical indulgence in Mexico

**Why it's hot** "With fab local food (who doesn't like nachos and guacamole or a fresh fish taco?) and tropical weather, you can really 'get away' here," says Alison Hotchkiss of AE Planning & Design. "I like the Gulf of Mexico and the amazing hotels in Cabo if you want bustling nightlife, the Pacific coast if you're an avid surfer or watersports fan, and the Caribbean side for white-sand beaches – it's magical in photos."

**Degree of difficulty** High for a legal wedding, so opt for a blessing. "We always recommend you get married legally at home – the rules can be a bit of a hassle."

**When to go** End of November to early June.

**Location, location** "I generally suggest hotels unless you have a planner. Estates to rent for weddings come and go on the market and tend to be for smaller groups of under 20, and arranging your own outside suppliers can be tricky from abroad. But you can find amazing homes on [vrbo.com](http://vrbo.com), which is a site for vacation rentals by owner. Just ask if they allow weddings."

**Must-haves** "It's easy to add a fiesta feel to your wedding with maracas, Mexican ceramics, woven Mexican bags and tropical flowers."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Costa Rica or anywhere in Central America. Belize has some fantastic resorts: Francis Ford Coppola's Blancaneaux Lodge or the new Four Seasons in Papagayo."

## Idyllic beauty in the Indian Ocean

**Why it's hot** "For most people, the Indian Ocean is their idea of paradise, and weddings here tend to be more couples-focused than the

# DISCOVER THE COOK ISLANDS

*James Bell from Turquoise Holidays has the lowdown on this heavenly South Pacific hotspot*



**Q What's so great about the Cook Islands?**

**A** These beautiful islands in the South Pacific offer a magical mix of traditional Polynesian culture and 21st century hotel luxury.

**Q When's the best time to go?**

**A** The tropical climate is lovely all year round, but the absolute best time to visit is the dry season between April and November.

**Q How long does it take to get there?**

**A** All in all it takes around 25 hours, flying via Los Angeles, but believe us – it's well worth the journey time!

**Q What ideas do you have for visiting more than one island or combining them with another destination?**

**A** Each of the Cook Islands has its own amazing personality. How about starting on Rarotonga, with its great snorkelling spots, then moving on to Aitutaki – home to one of the most stunning lagoons in the world – followed by a stopover in Los Angeles?

**Q How much will it cost me to go?**

**A** Prices start from £3450pp for seven nights at Little Polynesian, Rarotonga, five nights at Pacific Resort, Aitutaki, two nights at The Viceroy, LA, international and domestic flights, breakfasts and transfers within the Cook Islands.



family affairs in the Caribbean," says Virgin Holidays' Hayat Bourner. "Mauritius leads the pack, but Sri Lanka is getting increasingly popular now. Seychelles is also gorgeous but a bit more difficult to get to."

**Degree of difficulty** Varied. For Mauritius, the paperwork is simple and three days' residency is required. In Sri Lanka you'll need a Certificate of No Impediment in advance, and a five-day residency. And keep in mind that, legally, the Maldives only offers Muslim ceremonies so a blessing is your best bet here. Because you're going further afield, scan all of your important documents and email them to yourself so you can always access a copy in an emergency.

**When to go:** "Definitely in Britain's winter months – you'll get some exotic winter sun."

**Location, location** "For five-star luxury in Mauritius, check out Le Touessrok, a stunning private island. Or try a smaller boutique hotel such as 20 Degrees Sud, or even a historic plantation. In Sri Lanka, it's all about the breathtaking countryside, with lush gardens and amazing views of the Indian Ocean. We love the Taj Exotica, Eden Resort & Spa and Club Hotel Dolphin. In the Maldives, beachfront blessings are popular."

**Must-haves** "In Sri Lanka, we're able to offer local elephants to bring you to your ceremony or for photographs. I wouldn't bother with the flip-flops here, but parasols are nice for guests or even just the bride and groom – and they look gorgeous."

**Head off on honeymoon** "Mauritius and Dubai is a popular combination and great value for money. From Sri Lanka, you can carry on to Thailand or Bali. Couples marrying in the Seychelles and the Maldives tend to stay put!"

**For more information, call Turquoise on 01494 678400 or visit [www.turquoiseholidays.co.uk](http://www.turquoiseholidays.co.uk)**

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